

Message Text

PAGE 01 TUNIS 06182 011953Z

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ACTION SS-30

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FM AMEMBASSY TUNIS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3579

S E C R E T TUNIS 6182

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: OVIP (KISSINGER)

SUBJECT: SECRETARY'S VISIT TO MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

1. PRIME MINISTER NOUIRA CALLED ME TO HIS OFFICE URGENTLY THIS EVENING (7:00 PM LOCAL TIME NOVEMBER 1,) TO REQUEST THAT SECRETARY KISSINGER MAKE BRIEF STOPOVER AT TUNIS TO SEE PRESIDENT BOURGUIBA WHILE EN ROUTE FROM RABAT TO CAIRO. HE SAID "ONE-HOUR" MEETING ALL THAT BEING REQUESTED. (ALSO PRESENT WAS ALI HEDDA, DIRECTEUR DE CABINET AND AMBASSADOR-DESIGNATE TO WASHINGTON.)

2. NOUIRA SAID BOURGUIBA VERY "SENSITIVE" AT FACT TUNISIA BYPASSED WHILE MOROCCO BEING VISITED IN VIEW OF (A) BOURGUIBA'S LONGSTANDING CLOSE RELATIONS WITH U.S.; (B) HIS CONSISTENTLY MODERATE AND FAR-SIGHTED APPROACH TO ARABISRAELI QUESTION -- INCLUDING HIS ADVOCACY OF ARAB RECOGNITION OF ISRAEL LONG BEFORE OTHER ARAB GOVERNMENTS; AND (C) CONSTRUCTIVE IDEAS WHICH HE COULD NOW CONTRIBUTE IN SEARCH FOR PEACE.

3. NOUIRA SAID THAT, WHILE HE REALIZED THAT SECRETARY'S SCHEDULE IS EXTREMELY FULL, FOR SECRETARY TO IGNORE TUNISIA AT THIS JUNCTURE WOULD TEND TO IMPLY THAT USG REJECTS OR AT LEAST NOT INTERESTED IN RECENT BOURGUIBA PROPOSALS FOR PEACE SETTLEMENT. HE CHARACTERIZED THESE PROPOSALS AS REASONABLE AND IN KEEPING WITH WHAT U.S. HAS IN MIND. FOR EXAMPLE, HE SAID, BOURGUIBA PUBLICLY ADVOCATED DIRECT NEGOTIATIONS BETWEEN ISRAELIS AND ARABS.

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PAGE 02 TUNIS 06182 011953Z

4. FOR THIS REASON, CONTINUED NOUIRA, PRESIDENT BOURGUIBA FERVENTLY HOPED THAT SECRETARY COULD SPEND "MAXIMUM OF ONE HOUR" WITH HIM. NO MORE. ANY TIME OF DAY WOULD BE CONVENIENT

TO HIM. STOPOVER AT TUNIS, HE SAID, IS IMPORTANT "POLITICALLY AND DIPLOMATICALLY". IT IS A MATTER "OF PRINCIPLE".

5. COMMENT: FACT THAT BOURGUIBA SHOWED NO DISAPPOINTMENT YESTERDAY WHEN HE READ PRESIDENT'S LETTER INDICATING RABAT INCLUDED AND TUNIS EXCLUDED (TUNIS 6165) WAS OBVIOUSLY MISLEADING. IT IS CLEAR THAT HE IS UPSET. I AM AFRAID THAT HE CONSIDERS A BYPASS OF TUNISIA IN CIRCUMSTANCES IN WHICH SECRETARY IS VISITING MOROCCO, AS A SLAP-IN-THE-FACE. (HEDDA TOOK ME ASIDE AFTERWARDS TO SAY, "IT WOULDN'T BE SO BAD IF SECRETARY WERE NOT RPT NOT VISITING MOROCCO -- A COUNTRY FULL OF ECCENTRICITY".) AS PRIME MINISTER IMPLIES, IT IS SYMBOLISM WHICH IS SO IMPORTANT TO BOURGUIBA. WHILE I APPRECIATE TREMENDOUS PRESSURE OF TIME UNDER WHICH SECRETARY IS OPERATING, I HOPE THAT TUNISIAN REQUEST CAN BE GIVEN FULL CONSIDERATION. I ESTIMATE THAT A MAXIMUM OF TWO HOURS WOULD BE NECESSITATED FOR A STOPOVER -- TEN MINUTES EACH WAY FROM AIRPORT TO PALACE UNDER POLICE ESCORT, ONE HOUR AT PALACE, WITH ANOTHER FORTY MINUTES TO ALLOW TIME CONSUMED IN LANDING, TAKING OFF AND OTHER EXIGENCIES.

6. ONE LAST POINT: BOURGUIBA IS PLUGGED IN TO MODERATE PALESTINIANS, AND ENJOYS EXCELLENT RELATIONS WITH BOUMEDIENE AND QADHAFI. HE COULD BE USEFUL TO US.

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